



Afghanistan, Pakistan & Al Qaeda: 10 Years After 9/11 and Beyond

A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION FEATURING:

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Featured Speakers:

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MR. RAJIV CHANDRASEKARAN: Okay, can everyone hear me now? Good morning. Those of you who are going out for coffee in the back and making your way out and those coming in, can take your seats, please. This is the last event before lunch. This is a panel that really needs no introduction. If you don't know who the four distinguished individuals are up here with me, perhaps you are in the wrong ballroom this morning.

To the far right, Lieutenant General Retired Dave Barno, who's now a Senior Advisor and Senior Fellow at CNAS. Back in 2003, he commanded 20,000 U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, and from 2006 to 2010, he served as the director of the NESAC Center at NDU. His time in Kabul, which involved a very close partnership with Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, is widely regarded as a gold standard in civ-mil relations in Afghanistan.

To my immediate left is Steve Coll, the president of the New America Foundation, also a former boss of mine. He spent 20 years as a foreign correspondent and senior editor at the Post. He of course wrote *The Bin Ladens* and the amazing Pulitzer winning *Ghost Wars*. What's really amazing is that he managed to write *Ghost Wars* while serving as the managing editor of the Post. Nobody multitasks as deftly as Steve does.

To my immediate right, Ambassador Anne Patterson. Ambassador Patterson served as our ambassador in Islamabad from July, 2007 to October, 2010. Prior to her assignment in Pakistan, she served as the assistant secretary for the INL Bureau at the Department of State. Her tireless work in Pakistan has earned her a relaxing sinecure for her next posting. Last month, President Obama nominated her to be the next ambassador to Egypt. (Laughter.)

And to the far left, Bing West, well, where to begin with Bing – his most recent book is provocatively titled *The Wrong War: Grit, Strategy, and the Way Out of Afghanistan*. He's also the author of seven other books, including *The Village*, the acclaimed portrait of a combined action platoon in one Vietnamese hamlet that has become a must read for soldiers and marines.

He served as an assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs in the Reagan administration, but when he's in Afghanistan, as he is much of the time now, he's just one of the guys. On patrols, he's right up there with the lance corporal, walking point.

Just a couple of months ago, I landed at follow up, up in Helmand just after he left. I asked one of the marines what it was like having Bing around. Without a pause he said, "that guy has brass balls." (Laughter.)

So we're going to forgo the usual opening statements and get right to a discussion. I'm going to start off the conversation with them and then we'll kick it open to questions. And to further speed things

along, I'm going to skip the setup. AfPak, al Qaeda, nine years after 9/11, we all know the setup here. We want to hear what these guys have to say.

So let's begin with perhaps the most significant development this year or perhaps for some years now in the broader fight against terrorism, and that's the killing of Osama bin Laden and its impact in the future of al Qaeda. And I'd like to start with Steve. Let's put aside for a moment, Steve, al Qaeda affiliates elsewhere, particularly in Yemen, where there seems to be genuine danger of AQAP expanding its influence and footprint because of the turmoil that's enveloped that nation. I'd like to focus to Pakistan and to a lesser extent Afghanistan.

With bin Laden out of the picture, with his interim replacement Saif al-Adel, having spent much of his time since 9/11 in Iranian custody, with frictions in the top ranks of the organization, with the CIA's drone campaign having eliminated numerous midlevel commanders, with new efforts to restrict the cash they need to operate, and with some of the allies among the Afghan Taliban exploring ever so haltingly the idea of peace talks with the Kabul government, is al Qaeda a spent force in South Asia at the moment?

MR. STEVE COLL: No, but they face, your question suggests, a succession crisis that they've never known before and that might challenge them substantially. After all, al Qaeda, as you say, is many things. From its beginning, it was a core organization that's had 20 plus years of continuous history under the same emir, deputy emir until May. It's also a network of likeminded groups that occasionally collaborate. It's a series of franchises in diverse parts of the Muslim world, and it's also a kind of brand, a fundraising mechanism, a position in the minds of followers who may never meet an al Qaeda leader. So in that light, what are the aspects of Osama's disappearance that matter most in South Asia? I think I would mention a couple of them.

First is the succession. Al Qaeda was founded as an organization in a series of houses and the university town of Peshawar, in the summer of 1988. As I say, it's had the same boss ever since. Now, it has to find a new one. And the circumstances of the succession process are going to be very difficult because everybody who is a contender is in hiding.

You can't have a series of human resources interviews and write out the job description. It's going to have to be done under enormous pressure. And I don't think anyone on the horizon can easily replace the symbolic role that bin Laden held. He was someone who narrated the war from a position of credibility among his followers. His credibility was rooted in 9/11 to some extent. And he also had a gift of building a big tent sort of strategy and bringing people to him. And I don't see any – anyone who could carry out the kind of global symbolic role that he played. So his disappearance matters.

Then there's the question of why is al Qaeda valuable to those who take it on as a name, as a force? It's a learning organization. It transfers tactics among regional franchises. It does a lot of things, but mainly, I think, it's useful because it helps raise funds and attract recruits. In that sense, it's a brand that attracts a certain kind of young person. And there's a question about al Qaeda's branding and its role in fundraising and recruiting, which is, was this ever a brand more like Martha Stewart or Trump located in a single individual or was it more like Nike, just a swoosh that cool people wanted to be around in a certain violent milieu.

And I do think that we'll be able to watch the value that al Qaeda creates for others over the next couple of years, the extent to which people actually adopt that terminology, or the extent to which they run away from it because it's poisonous and likely to get you on a target list. And I think you're going to see more disillusion than not.

Two other quick points. Al Qaeda in South Asia is blending increasingly with breakaway splinter sections of important Pakistan rooted groups from the Punjab. This is the most dangerous element of what's happening in South Asia today. I think the migration of Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, sectarian Sipah-e-Sahaba groups, individuals often from those groups coming up to the frontier, connecting with international trainers and volunteers, some of whom call themselves al Qaeda, and then waging revolutionary violence against the state of Afghanistan.

Whether al Qaeda exists or continues to strengthen as an organization the ways are described it – whether it weakens – that soup is going to continue to bubble and create a lot of violence and havoc in the region.

One last reason why I think it matters. There is an incipient process to determine whether sections of the Taliban leadership, particularly the Quetta Shura around Mullah Omar, might be willing to engage constructively in negotiations with the United States, other parties to the conflict or not. And the United States has made it quite clear that it would not consider such negotiations in a serious way unless at some stage, in a verifiable and meaningful way, the Taliban broke with al Qaeda. So what does Osama's death mean for that proposition?

I think it is true, as Secretary of Defense Gates said in an interview this week, that Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden did have a close personal relationship, the absence of which might create space for the Taliban to take decisions that it did not take in earlier eras. Mullah Omar had a house in Kandahar that you may have visited. It was occupied by Special Forces after December, 2001. That Osama built for him. He built an Eid Mosque in downtown Kandahar. He swore personal allegiance to Mullah Omar.

When the Taliban fell, in 2001, there was a marketplace under construction in downtown Kandahar,

since we had a sign in front of it in Pashtu that said something in the effect of “coming soon, Kandahar’s newest shopping mall, brought to you by Mullah Omar and Osama bin Laden, under construction, due in spring of 2002.” So that was the nature of their relationship. It covered business, fundraising, war, and religion.

However, I know that we shouldn’t be too optimistic about this. Mullah Omar has had plenty of opportunities to break with al Qaeda in circumstances where it was much more rational for him to do so than now and he has failed to do it at every intersection. And by credible accounts, though they’re fragmentary, of inter-Taliban discussions about why the Taliban has refused to break with al Qaeda, the personal relationship with Osama bin Laden has occasionally surfaced in these accounts as a factor out of Mullah Omar’s sort of lips, but he also has deep seated theological objections to such a break and those may pertain here.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Fascinating. I want to come back to a couple of these things, including the stew of other likeminded groups like LeT and Jaish-e-Mohammed, in a second. But I want to bring in Ambassador Patterson to the discussion here and to spin this a little bit toward the impact of all this on U.S.-Pakistan relations. In one of the reports that CNAS is releasing today, the “Beyond Afghanistan” report, let me quote a little bit from it – it states – and among the authors is General Barno – it says, “Pakistan remains deeply conflicted internally and pervasively anti-American and will continue to behave in ways that are sometimes contrary to U.S. interests. It’s demonstrably not a unitary actor. And that recognition should heavily influence U.S. policy decisions. Thus, the United States should remain committed to the people in the State of Pakistan for the long term, the most promising policy choice in a field littered with poor options.”

I ask you, Ambassador Patterson, do you agree with that assessment, and assuming you do, how should the Obama administration pursue that commitment? What’s the balance between embracing them as a strategic partner and demanding accountability, not just for bin Laden, but a host of issues, from corruption to human rights to support for Afghan insurgents?

You know, the Pentagon brass have bragged about the close relationship that Admiral Mullen, for instance, has cultivated with General Kayani, which has included things like rounds of golf, aerial sightseeing of K2, and late night cigar smoking. But did that sort of bonhomie mask fundamental differences that were not confronted bluntly enough?

In other words, did the U.S. military value having a close relationship more than what that relationship actually delivered. And last week’s visit by Secretary Clinton and Admiral Mullen by all accounts didn’t fare that well. The Pakistani military now seems to be more focused on ejecting American trainers than contemplating on events in North Waziristan. The Middle East feelings are still raw, but what are the next steps? The administration’s facing new pressure from the Hill on

providing aid and security cooperation. How should Washington, moving forward, reset the relationship with Pakistan?

AMB. ANNE PATTERSON: Let me sort of step back here about overall national interests that we have with Pakistan. And as Steve pointed out, they have a raging domestic insurgency in what is increasingly a witch's brew of terrorist and extremist groups that threaten the state. They have enormous social and demographic challenges, perhaps more than any country on the planet. And they're on the glide path to be the fifth largest nuclear power in the world.

So we need to sort of reflect on the long-term view of our relationship with Pakistan. And let me say that I think – I think the report was excellent and had a lot of good ideas. Pakistan is a country rife with contradictions that simply drives Americans to enormous frustration, but we have no choice but to continue on the path that we're on, which is to engage with Pakistan, to try and make the civilian government prosper and stronger. The Obama administration has doubled down on both civilian assistance – they tripled it in one year.

Military assistance between the reimbursements and standard military assistance is running about \$2.5 billion a year. And in my view, we have no choice but to continue those projects and continue to engage with Pakistani leadership. And I would take issue with your statement or your proposition that the military relationship has not born through because I think while Pakistan is again a country of immense frustration, they've also been our partners in the counterterrorism war and many unheralded successes.

But I'd like to sort of make one final point about the way forward with Pakistan because I think Americans underestimate how much influence India has on Pakistan's psyche and on its relationship with us and on its relationship with Afghanistan.

It is hard to underestimate how much India's economic clout, its political clout, and particularly its international prestige, have affected Pakistan. And one reason our relationships are so complex right now is they see us as having thrown them over for the prettier girl next door. So I would particularly endorse the last recommendation in the CNAS report that we should broker confidence building recommendations, confidence building measures between Pakistan and India, because I think the benefits for the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, and frankly the benefits for the region as a whole, both economically and politically, would be enormous.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: How do you get over the zero sum elements, though, of the view in the region that a closer U.S. relationship with India is seen as a threat in Islamabad and vice versa?

AMB. PATTERSON: Because you've got to start somewhere. I mean I know that Pakistanis, in

particular, suffer from the zero sum perspective on this. And the late Richard Holbrooke was eloquent when he would talk to leaders about this, as many others have been, but you have to start, in my view, with some of the smaller border disputes. I understand they're talking about Siachen Glacier right now, the Sir Creek. There're a number of other issues; the economic perspective and prospects for the region are simply enormous. And the business communities in Pakistan, which is a blind spot in Pakistan, should engage more actively on that because it's in everybody's interest. I don't know. It'll take a lot of work.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Let's bring in Afghanistan into this and General Barno. You know, reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan government has taken on a new urgency since the death of bin Laden. As my colleague Karen DeYoung recently reported, the administration has accelerated some of its direct talks with the Taliban, initially reported several months ago by the guy sitting to my left. There've been at least three meetings now in Qatar and Germany between Afghan government officials and a Taliban officials close to Mullah Omar that have also apparently included representatives of the U.S. government. But it increasingly seems like the path to peace in Afghanistan will have to go through Islamabad, or perhaps more specifically, Rawalpindi. So how can the U.S. bring the Pakistanis on board with the peace process when significant elements of the Pakistani national security establishment still see extremist groups in Afghanistan as part of their nation's strategic depth with regard to India? And what role should other neighbors play in this process, specifically Iran, China, and India?

LTG DAVID BARNO: Thanks, Rajiv. I think that's a fundamental question. And I spent a week in Pakistan in January, got to interact with many of the senior military, intelligence, governmental figures, as well as students and academics, and got out to the tribal areas a little bit. And one of the takeaways from that visit, which surprised me a bit, is that it was clear that Pakistan wants to see this conflict next door resolved. And what's equally clear is that they were extraordinarily concerned that they were going to get left with this mess on their doorstep that would be a redheaded step child, if you will, they would have to care for, for the next decade or more, after the United States left.

So I think one of the most important things U.S. needs to do as soon as possible – and President Obama's speech, perhaps next month in July may provide an opportunity for this – is dispel some of the uncertainty about the future U.S. role in the region. I think one of the great tragedies in a sense in the last two years in terms of understanding what the U.S. is planning to do was perhaps the misinterpreted or, some would argue, correctly interpreted one liner out of President Obama's December '09 West Point speech, which was that U.S. command force would begin withdrawing from Afghanistan in July, 2011. That was the only line remembered from that speech, big speech, important speech, but the message in the region was the Americans are leaving. The Americans are moving for the exit. And everyone there, as all of us know, are spring loaded to expect that outcome

anyway because that's what history has told them.

Yet, we've still been very opaque about what our long-term goals are in the region and whether we expect to have a long-term presence there. So one of the things we argued in this report that we've just released, as well as the one in December, is the United States needs a long-term small military presence in this part of the world, that that sends an unmistakable message that we're going to remain committed.

Right now, the Pakistanis are hedging their bets. They're always maintaining a plan B because history has told them that they need to make sure they're best postured for the day after the Americans are gone because that's going to come at some point in time. Their geography is not going to change. They're always going to be Afghanistan's neighbor. They're always going to be India's neighbor. They have to hedge against the prospect of us being no longer a player in that region.

So I think, first of all, we need to spell that notion that we're – we do have an end game that's departing the region wholesale, and that we have a plan, have some projects there.

The other regional players are ambivalent on this, but again, the lack of certainty about what the United States expects, where it's going, what it wants to do, all causes them to have hedging plans that work around our interests and then fundamentally work against what we want to accomplish. So I think that's the most important thing.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: But in an environment where troop levels are going to be headed down, starting in July, how big of a U.S. presence does there need to be post-2014? What is the – a strategic framework that is currently being negotiated between Washington and Kabul need to sort of spell out to create the necessary incentive, in your view, to get both various Taliban actors, as well as the Pakistani government to see that a U.S. presence is significant enough and enduring enough? What does that level have to be?

LTG BARNO: In December, we argued in our report that the number should be between 25,000 and 35,000 Americans. Now – which premised on two things. One is that a part of that force, a substantial part of it, would continue to have to fight the counterterrorism battle against al Qaeda and its associated groups across the region. And you would need some significant U.S. special operations capability to do that. The other part of the force, which premised on continuing to have to fight the Taliban – now, that might, in fact, no longer be the case two or three or four years from now.

We hope that's the direction we're heading. So that could be a smaller U.S. force, but the Iraq

answer, which now appears to be zero American troops, is not the right answer. And we think that there's an opportunity here as the year continues to strike a bargain with the Afghan government, who actually wants Americans to remain in Afghanistan, who's very concerned about what the impact is if the U.S. does leave. And from both the security standpoint and economic standpoint very much wants to stay connected to some flow of U.S. security dollars.

And our premise on this, in one way, is that this is not about the island of Afghanistan. It's about the region. And that the U.S. has long-term, vital national security interests in this region that require at least a small U.S. military presence to protect those. I think it's very important that we work hard this year to get that out there in the public square and negotiate some type of agreement with Afghanistan to be able to do that. That will have, in my view, a calming effect on the region as a whole.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Let me bring you in here, Bing. You know, with this looming drawdown, coupled with some very tough to swallow statistics that all of us know very well – almost 1,500 Americans now having died in Afghanistan since the start of the war, a price tag this year that will exceed \$113 billion, and plans to spend more than \$100 billion next year on the civ-mil presence in Afghanistan. This has many people searching for a more sustainable mission, one that involves less cost, both in dollars and lives.

In *The Wrong War*, you say that we need to fight a smarter war, that we need to cut back on the unsuccessful mission of population protection and democratic nation building and shift to a smaller footprint mission that's more focused on special operations raids and advising Afghan security forces. You're also skeptical of the prospects of a peace deal with the Taliban. But tell us how we get to a smaller, less costly mission without seeing hard fought gains erode?

If our military units aren't engaged in governance and development, because, let's be honest, through all the talk about a civilian surge, there haven't been that many civilians proportionately speaking sent down to the district level in Afghanistan. So if the military isn't doing it, who is? And if nobody is, if our soldiers and Marines are just focused on killing the bad guys and training the Afghan security forces, what keeps more of the country from slipping back into the old cycle of warlordism that helped fuel this conflict in the first place?

MR. BING WEST: What do we care? What I mean is that I like the fact that this conference is called "Risk-Reward" because when you're a country in penury, you have to begin to consider risk versus reward. The reason we tried nation building in Afghanistan was because of our hubris, on the one hand, and because we thought we were so rich we could do anything. And so we've spent 10 years with 9th century tribes on a bunch of rocks, trying to sort of say a social contract is the way we'll do business as a military.

Our United States military, years ago, said that they had a new doctrine. And they said, from now on, soldiers and Marines have to be nation builders as well as warriors. I've been – (inaudible) – for years and I think that's nuts because what we succeeded in doing in Afghanistan – and it isn't just Karzai, it's all the way down to any village elder – we have created a culture of entitlement. And we came in and it was just what the General was saying. He said every one of our commanders has to balance what he does for governance with security. Well, why does he have to do that? Why do we have to undertake those missions? So we have driven the Afghans, after 10 years, to expect when you look at an American, you see a dollar sign. And when we have \$1.5 billion in what we call emergency response programs, just the 65 battalions, that means every battalion commander is walking around with millions of dollars that he has to spend.

So we have trained just like Lyndon Baines Johnson believed that you could have a war on poverty and a great society and caused chaos by doing so, we've done the same with the Afghans. We've said, "we'll do everything for you." Therefore, you get to risk-reward.

But the General was proposing that he has a plan for the next three and a half years. Okay, three and a half more years at \$100 billion a year, with, say you go from 100,000 to 90,000, 80,000, can we do all that? Sure, we can. The issue becomes risk-reward, do you want to do that? Are there other strategies? And I think that you're going to see a real interesting month, next month, when the president grapples with this, versus the amount of money we have and the treasure in our soldiers and Marines that we're expanding, and asks, "is this the only way to go?" And the alternative, I think, is quite clear. You go to a very heavy advisor force, which CNAS has recommended. And I say that for two reasons.

The Taliban aren't that great a threat. The idea that we're trying to keep them from taking over the country, fine, how do you take over a country? How did they take over the country in the mid '90s? Well, they had a lot of help from Pakistan in terms of logistics. To go into a big city, you don't do it on a few motorcycles. You can be a pain in the neck out in the rural areas forever, but once you start moving, you have the mess. And that means somebody has to provide you with many vehicles and a logistic system. I guarantee you. The Pakistanis are not going to do that. In fact, I think the Pakistanis are doing us a great favor because the arms that the Taliban have are nickel dime. They don't have anything that's serious in the way of armament and I'm absolutely convinced that's because the Pakistani somehow have clamped down so they don't get them.

Let me give you an example. We have 60 blimps now over our outposts. And – (inaudible) – there watching the area 24 hours a day. You can see them, right up there. Not one of them can be touched by any Taliban because they don't have the logistics base. The other thing we have is remarkable aerial surveillance that I never believed that I would see in my lifetime. And every single

patrol you're out with, there's somebody up there watching.

We can thin out our ranks dramatically, as the General was saying, and leave behind some people who are the advisors that have these kinds of equipments and let the Afghans do their own fighting and their own civil war. And you get to a risk-reward, are you taking more risk than us doing everything for them for the next three and a half years? Yes, you are. You're taking a risk. But I think that the state of our own economy and having worn down our force and the steady casualties we take, I would argue for taking this risk and not for going for us in the forefront for another three and a half years of this war. And I do not believe the Taliban would end up in control in Afghanistan. But it's a risk that you're going to have to take.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: So what sort of end state, how messy – and I want to ask all of you guys this – how messy can Afghanistan get without it fundamentally compromising core U.S. national security interests? You know, when General McChrystal submitted his commander's assessment that preceded his request for more forces in the summer of 2009, sort of he defined the end state in Afghanistan as one in which the insurgency no longer threatens the viability of the central state. You know – is that where to go? You heard a vision described by Lieutenant General Rodriguez that has also been embraced by Ambassador Eikenberry and others in the U.S. government that calls for very active efforts down at the sub national level, that – the district delivery program, which some of the embassy in Kabul now have taken to calling the “district disaster program, but – getting – you know – ministry representatives down to district levels, rebuilding local shuras.

Where – what is – what should that level of involvement be going forward and how messy can we tolerate? And I'd like to hear from the rest of you in terms of how messy can Afghanistan get with regard to trying to ensure that al Qaeda doesn't come back and ensuring that it doesn't fundamentally destabilize Pakistan?

But let me start with you, Bing.

MR. WEST: Well, I'll start with – I used to go to Nuristan and I used to go to Northern Kunar. We're out of there now. We were pushed out. They fundamentally just pushed us out. So can you have a mess and still continue on? Yes. Our issue should have been do we want transnational terrorists who can strike from Afghanistan against other countries? And I don't believe that will occur. It's a risk, but I don't believe it and I think you can have an absolute mess in the countryside.

Yemen's a mess. Pakistan's a mess. These insurgencies – let them kill each other forever as far as I'm concerned just as long as they're not killing us. So I would restrict the mission to are you telling me that there's a threat such as used to exist in Jalalabad, in Kandahar when Mullah Omar was living

there and planning everything? You say, no, I'm not giving you any sanctuary like that. Then, basically, I'd say that's enough. I'll leave the rest being a mess.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Will al Qaeda respond sort of rationally to this that even if you go down to a world, Steve, where there're 20,000-30,000 U.S. forces, many of them special operators, that if the cost of doing business in Afghanistan is incrementally greater than the Fatah that they won't seek to come back in significant numbers? What does a messier Afghanistan look like? How does that impact transnational terrorism?

MR. COLL: Well, I mean, let me first register my disagreement with some of Bing's framing. I mean, I love Bing and I agree very much with his framing about the U.S. as kind of resource curse in Afghanistan. The size of American investments, the amount of money we spend, the way we spend it has had a distorting effect on every aspect of the Afghan political economy. And it should be our goal to reduce both the size of our presence in troops and the distorting effects that we have on the political economy, but to do it in a responsible way.

I'm not suggesting that this is quite what Bing was saying, but it would be quite unwise, I think to have a policy goal of inducing a civil war. And Afghans deserve better than that from us and so do all the men and women who have sacrificed from the United States military to date.

So we are in a transition. It should be the goal to manage that transition successfully, and as to end states, then, yes, I do think – and as to vital U.S. interests, I think there are specific answers to your question. What capacities, regardless of whether or not we're successful in preventing a medium grade civil war or a large grade civil war in Afghanistan during this transition, what residual capacities would line up with U.S. interests? That was a form of your question.

So I think, one is the capacity to carry out counterterrorism action against international terrorists, including a raid such as the one that was carried out against Osama bin Laden. United States gives up an Afghanistan that can host bases that can launch the capacity that was brought to bear on that night. Then it will lose a significant capacity that is relevant to its interests.

I think there's a second, which is a little more indirect, but I think easy enough for us to agree on, or many of us, which is that – something that I hope the Pakistan army increasingly is thinking about in managing its own place in this next transition, which is if Afghanistan were to become a sanctuary for anti-Pakistani Islamist revolutionaries, that accelerated the potential of the Pakistani Taliban to metastasize into a force that threatened the Pakistani state, that would be disastrous for the United States because of the strategic assets that the Pakistani state holds. And part of the problem with thinking about how much messiness is enough is that you could imagine uncontested rural territory in Afghanistan becoming such a sanctuary, even if the Afghan government supported by the

international community held on to cities in the Ring Road and sort of the Najibullah state that we used to visit in a certain day.

AMB. PATTERSON: Thank you. Let me make a couple of points. I disagree with Mr. West about – I agree it’s a question of risk-reward, but in three and a half years in Pakistan, I saw many threats, actually less against us than against our allies, and I don’t think there’s any reason to believe that with messing this at varying degrees that that wouldn’t move right back in the Afghanistan as a prosper for a number of years. So I think that would be the first issue.

The second issue is one that Steve points out that this would be inherently destabilizing to Pakistan. And they get this. I think there is a misperception that Pakistan wants the Taliban back in power in Afghanistan. Nothing can be further from the truth. They don’t want the Taliban back because they’ve seen how the Taliban can destabilize and metastasize their own groups and hook up with them. And these cross border raids are in many respects a two-way street. They don’t want the Northern Alliance to align with India, either. So they have very conflicted approach to Afghanistan.

And finally, if they see a degree of messiness or a lack of American commitment in Afghanistan, I think the Pakistanis will hedge their bets to a possibly paralyzing extent.

So there’re a lot of things that could go wrong in Pakistan from a messy situation in Afghanistan. But given the strategic interests we have in Pakistan, I think it would be a very high risk to run.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Dave, is there a middle ground here in terms of an Afghan end state that is not the total disengagement, let them duke it out themselves, but is something more sustainable than the scope of the civ-mil COIN effort that is being sort of deployed in significant parts of the country right now?

LTG BARNO: Yes and I think that’s going to really be the challenge the next three and a half years, is designing that structure in a way that gets you to an Afghanistan that’s stable because, in my view, and I think each of the panelists have noted this in one way or another, Afghanistan, in a sense, is the keystone to regional stability. If you have an unstable Afghanistan, it’s like to engender an unstable region. Once it starts bleeding into Pakistan, the threat there on the subcontinent – it’s the only place where we have two nuclear armed countries facing off with each other over disputed border that have fought three wars in the last 40 years. This is an extraordinarily dangerous part of the world. Now, unstable Afghanistan is going to, you know, make that a much more dangerous place than it is.

So I think that we’re going to have to find a way in the next three and a half years to take our vast aid – (inaudible) – of dollars, which several of us have described, and neck that down without collapsing

the Afghan economy, which is very reliant upon us right now, and helping to design something that gets to what some are calling Afghan good enough, to a steady state of Afghanistan that's stable. I hope that's seasoned by our small American military presence and that's got a long-term commitment, but it does it at far lower costs than what we're doing.

I think that's achievable, but I'm not sure we've crystallized the realization. We have to start designing for that outcome yet.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Is – yes –

MR. WEST: As long as we do it for them, they're not going to do it for themselves. And we could go for another three and a half years the way we're doing, and as I indicated, I believe that we've made progress, but until we see the Afghans fighting for the Afghans, until we see them standing up for themselves, we're just pushing back the tide, and it's just a question of when that transition will start. And I'd just like to see it start earlier. There will be a civil war over there. I define it as a civil war right. There's a civil war going on in Pakistan, a civil war going on in Afghanistan. The Pashtuns have always wanted Pashtunistan. All those kinds of things are going to go on for the next 10, 20, or 30 years.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: – I was having a coffee yesterday with a State Department representative who was just back on home leave, who stationed out in Garmsir, and who's been there for now almost 20 months. And he was noting that they're now in a position, and this is after about three years of U.S. full spectrum counterinsurgency operations that began in the summer of 2008, that they're getting more police now than they can take, but it's taken three years. And he believes that it's going to take many more months of a continued international presence there.

How do you bring that about in a world where those troop levels are going to be fundamentally coming down and you want to continue on a path of reinforcing this stability? But in most of these areas where you started to see some real positive developments with the coined effort, they all still seem to be, in the words of General Rodriguez and General Petraeus and others, fragile and reversible. And it seems hard to imagine that you're going to be in a world, even at the end of this year where the commanders, where General Allen and General Scaparrotti, you're going to be able to take significant numbers of troops from the south and move them to the east to deal with the very real issues that are taking place in the P2K (ball ?) and elsewhere. So how do you square that?

LTG BARNO: Well, I would just say that I think Bing has just exactly right – it's time to get the Afghans deeper into this fight, to get the in front with American enablers, American advisors. And you've got an enormously large Afghan security force that's been built over the last several years. The army is by almost all estimations an extraordinarily effective force by regional standards. It can

fight. The soldiers are of that – (inaudible) – they’re very inclined to fighting. One of my allied counterparts said that they were – it’s in their DNA to be warriors. We’ve been very reluctant to let them be in the lead in these fights. And I’ve heard anecdotally from a number of friends down the region that the Afghans are ready to do more than we’re allowing them to do. It’s time to push them forward, I think.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Let’s open it up to you, guys. There are folks with microphones walking around. If you want to raise your hand, just – you keep the questions short and keep them framed in terms of a question, please, and you can either address it to a specific member of the panel or the panel as a whole. Right over there, at the aisle.

Q: Hi, Rob Levinson, Bloomberg Government. Ambassador Patterson, you were involved in what is probably the most successful but unsung counterinsurgency effort the United States has done in Colombia. I spent a lot of time there. I was involved with SOUTHCOM, when you were ambassador and then in INL. And there we’ve done it with no more than 800 guys on the ground and probably spent the total of what about a month costs us in Afghanistan. Obviously different places, but I wonder if you might comment on the similarities or differences and what we might learn from what we did successfully there.

AMB. PATTERSON: We had a much more longstanding relationship with the Colombians over many decades, Special Forces training and alike, and the key – one of the key differences is a 12-year hiatus we had in engagement in Pakistan. So as many of you know, there has been a so-called “lost generation” of military officers that had no contact with United States, and we’re going to be paying that price for years to come. But it was in many respects an entirely different kind of conflict because it wasn’t fueled by this religious veneer. And in many cases in Pakistan it is a veneer.

And then Pakistan was a country – excuse me – Colombia was a country that had civilian institutions and had been controlled by civilians for decades and didn’t have the demographic and social problems that Pakistan confronts. So frankly, it was a much easier environment in which to make progress.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Right over here in the third row.

Q: Matt Noise (ph) from the Kennedy School. I’m struck – every time 2014 is mentioned, it’s always in regards to the U.S. withdrawal. It almost feels like we’ve forgotten there’s a presidential election that year. What – how will NATO ending their mission there affect the international community’s ability to ensure it’s a fair, free, and credible, whatever adjective you want to use, election? And for those that are in favor of a continued military presence there, how will that not be a casualty to the Afghan politics? Thanks.

LTG BARNO: Yes, I think – (inaudible) – having been there for the first Afghan presidential election, in 2004, which I think I could argue pretty shakily was the best of the two we’ve had so far – (laughter). There’re – a couple of thoughts. Number one, the constitution in Afghanistan right now prevents the president from running for a third term. President Karzai was first the interim president of Afghanistan, then served the full five-year term, now is in his second five-year term. There are indications he’s keen to serve a third five-year term.

So I think one of the things that we’re going to have to look at – Ambassador Crocker is going to have to be involved with is ensuring that there is the prospect of a constitutional succession in Afghanistan that starts in 2014. How emerging leaders in Afghanistan come to the fore in a political environment where there’s no political parties makes that fairly problematic.

I don’t think that the NATO transition, which right now is scheduled to essentially conclude at the end of 2014, infers there’s going to be no military presence after that. Even NATO has alluded, at least elliptically, to the fact that they’re going to have long-term commitments of some sort beyond that.

So I don’t think we should view that as an end of game, full withdrawal, the West no longer engaged. And I think one of the key tests that as you suggest needs to occur before that transition gets to December ’14 is to help actually set conditions for a successful presidential election in 2014. I think we utterly failed to do that on the last presidential election. In fact, it wasn’t even viewed as part of the ISAF mission.

I hope we won’t make that mistake again.

MR. COLL: Could I just add one thing? I think it’s a good question because the political side of the transition that’s ahead, no matter what the pace of the troop withdrawal, no matter what the evolution of the military strategy, is going to be vulnerable to capture by those sections – by President Karzai or his advisors who may wish an unconstitutional third term. And there is going to be a lot of pressure on the international community to stand firm around the principle that there should be a constitutional transition and to stand firm on behalf of those flawed but important emerging sources of constructive diverse political activity in the country, primarily the parliament.

The embassies in Kabul did a great job in the winter of standing up to President Karzai’s effort to keep the parliament from being ceded. But I’m not sure that in their host capitals anybody was paying much attention to that kind of struggle. It’s often too easy to stay with the incumbent we know, however flawed, than to take the hard risks of building a more sustainable plural Afghan politic. We don’t have to fantasize about democracy or talk about Switzerland to recognize that

there are enormously diverse numbers of credible Afghan leaders who want to participate in peaceful, constructive politics and ought to be a high priority of the transition between now and 2014 to give them the space to represent their communities.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Right over there, second – (inaudible).

Q: Madam Ambassador, my name is Jake Diliberto. I represent, again, Veterans for Rethinking Afghanistan. You had made a comment that said that if we leave Afghanistan or begin troop withdrawals, that perhaps we may have the adverse effect of destabilizing Pakistan. Clarification, any more than we're already doing now with the drone strikes and every – one of the things I'm concerned about – this month, a Pakistani think tank released a report saying that there are 600 known al Qaeda militants that the Pakistani jails are releasing back to population because they don't have the proper governance and justice assets to keep them there. So I'm not – I'm – if you could clarify or kind of help me understand some of that.

AMB. PATTERSON: Well, let me say just generally speaking to this audience, our intelligence programs in Pakistan have been a runaway success, and our first responsibility as American officials and military and intelligence leaders is to protect the United States. And again, I think our intelligence programs, in that respect, have been enormously successful. And – but let me – I think the question was about – the original question was about the degree of messiness in Afghanistan. And yes, the problem with Pakistan is that they are going – as General Barno explained so eloquently, is they're going to hedge their bets until they have a better idea of what's going to happen in Afghanistan.

And so – so the situation becomes a little more unstable every day in Pakistan. That to me is a scary thing. The long-term prospects are frightening. What we've seen dramatically in the past three and a half years is this scenario that Steve outlined, which is groups coming together in the attack on GHQ in Pakistan in late 2009 have represented something like three different groups as they sell each other their services as guns – (inaudible). So until Pakistani leaders have a better – have a better perspective, have more confidence in what's going to happen in Afghanistan, I don't think they're going to take the steps that the country needs to stabilize their own situation.

LTG BARNO: Yes, if I could add to that. When I was there in January, one of the things that surprised in all of my encounters was the degree of fear among the elites about the stability of the country, and the leading fear was the economic fear. I'd heard that even from senior military officers that their economy was going to eventually get to a point of collapse. That's something the U.S. has to look at and perhaps do a bit more than we've been doing there. And then somewhere well down on that list was – there were certainly internal instability and extremism, the radicalization of population. About fourth place was India, which I found quite striking compared

to previous visits out there. So I think there is an internal recognition that they have some very serious problems.

One of the things I applaud the administration for doing, and I think Congress is helping move in this direction as well, is to reinforce programs aimed at the civilian government of Pakistan. In our report here, we suggest that the U.S. needs to continue to bolster those programs, to exploit some success there to make sure that money gets spent effectively, but then look at the military aid programs and ensure that we're getting proper bang for our buck there, that we know where that money is going, that it's more transparent and accountable. And again, I see the Hill moving in that direction during the last week or so.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: With regard to Pakistan and al Qaeda, you know, one of the most interesting things I think going on with regards to U.S.-Pakistan relations at the moment is this trial going on in Chicago. And the Mumbai accomplice David Headley recently testified that Lashkar-e-Taiba, which was the terrorist group responsible for the Mumbai attacks that killed 166 people, including six Americans, he said operated under the umbrella of the ISI. And he said ISI provided assistance to Lashkar that included financial, military, and moral support.

I want to ask you, Steve, and Ambassador Patterson, to what degree should the LeT be a focus of the U.S. counterterrorism activities in the region? Are we taking a hard enough line against them and if we're pushing the Pakistani government hard on the Haqqani network and the Quetta Shura Taliban? Do we lose any degree of leverage over the other affiliated groups that are out there causing significant trouble?

MR. COLL: Well, I think Lashkar is an important group and a complicated one. And the – one of its sort of aspects over the last three years is it's been fragmenting a little bit itself in order to hold on to its position as a ward of the Pakistani state, not jeopardize the considerable assets that it controls inside Pakistan: schools, hospitals, bank accounts, networks of volunteers. Lashkar is a complicated Hezbollah-like organization where there is a great degree of religious proselytizing and social work blended in with violent wings and young men who want to participate in international jihad.

So there's been a pattern in which the younger volunteers and more violent ones have been kind of setting their identity cards at the home office and then going out to the frontier to participate in al Qaeda affiliated, TTP affiliated violence. And some of this has expressed itself as international ambition. Where Lashkar gets even more dangerous and complicated is where it seems to serve as a proxy or a partial proxy of those elements of the Pakistani state that actually want to weaken India by carrying out violent attacks on Indian soil.

So the Mumbai attack, the question is how far up chain of command did knowledge in planning of

that attack go? And that is not a question that Indian officials would ask uniquely about Mumbai. The toll there was very high. They have had that question about a whole series of spectacular attacks that trace back to a certain level of authorship that includes retired and sometimes serving elements of the Pakistani state. But they cannot sort of hold the state accountable for that activity. And one reason why India – I'll just close with the observation that one reason why Indian and Pakistani relations are so frozen right now and it's debilitating across the region, including in Afghanistan, is because the Pakistani state is not accountable as a state for what I think the Indians regard as pretty convincing body of evidence that they would like to see carrying through.

Now, whether the Pakistani state has the capacity to do everything that everyone would wish of it, of course is another matter, but these are serious problems.

MR. WEST: Isn't the same true with us with the fact that there had to be some sort of collusion for Osama to be there and many other people who are in Haqqani and al Qaeda?

AMB. PATTERSON: Well, on LeT specifically, I don't think there is the serious doubt that this organization which was clearly set up by Pakistan's intelligence agencies to engage in asymmetric warfare against India has fractured. And this has happened repeatedly, and not just with the LeT, but with other groups inside of Pakistan. So they don't exercise control over this. ISAF has arrested LeT members in Afghanistan. Again, this is spreading and morphing. And these groups are working with each other to essentially threaten the Pakistani state now.

And I for one don't think they're entirely in control of LeT. I think they still have contacts with a lot of aspects of LeT. And yes, the same is true of other groups, but it's particularly true of the groups in Southern Punjab who've been out there for decades that are now also more radicalized and more energized by domestic events.

LTG BARNO: I think it essentially is the Kashmiri model of creating terrorist groups to do your bidding as an irregular warfare component of your security strategy is breaking down, and now we're seeing these groups – this is very dangerous to the United States. These groups are now, in some cases, taking on transnational objectives, which we'd never seen until the last two or three years. That makes this a much more complex problem than simply al Qaeda version 1.0, which is what we reacted to after the 9/11 attacks.

We're now going to – and it goes to our presence in the region. We're now going to have to be cognizant of the threat from these other groups who are outside of the immediate al Qaeda logo that are becoming as dangerous to the United States as al Qaeda has been in the past. And that phenomenon appears to be growing, which I think, again, is very troubling.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: On the regional engagement front, two Twitter questions, the first being what should we do with India to get them to help in Afghanistan? And I may want to flip that on its head, is there anything we should be doing with India to get them to perhaps pull back a little bit potentially to diffuse concerns in Islamabad?

And the second question also from Twitter land, can the panel speak to the role of Iran in Afghanistan?

MR. WEST: We could get two Indian battalions to come over and set up shop in Kunar Province. I think we would get the entire Pakistani army to suddenly be on the western border – (laughter). So that's how India can help. (Applause.)

MR. COLL: Out of the box thinking. I like it.

LTG BARNO: Another view of that.

MR. COLL: Yes.

LTG BARNO: No, I think it's a very good question. And Pakistan, as Ambassador Patterson knows, is incredibly sensitive about Indian activity inside of Afghanistan. They will not hesitate to provide a guess with – (inaudible) – on every Indian council and how many members are posted inside Afghanistan. I think India's actually been very helpful to the state of Afghanistan. It has done considerable amount of state building and nation building over the last 10 years there, especially in the road network. And the Afghan and Indian government have very good relations, far better than the Afghan and Pakistani government by and large.

So I think the U.S. just needs to maintain a quiet dialogue with India about its activities there. And as we get into a closer phase of potentially negotiating with the Taliban and talking to Pakistan about how to settle and resolve this conflict, we've got to keep the dialogue going quietly with India as well.

MR. COLL: If I could just add – well, I was just going to say, I don't think the United States wants – and I'm not suggesting that this is what Dave is saying, but the United States should not be imprisoned by Pakistani paranoia about India in Afghanistan as it fashions this transition. India has to be part of the solution. It's part of the regional context in which this multi-sided proxy war has been going on for 35 years. And the very strong relations that General Barno correctly points out exist between President Karzai and the Indian government now are actually probably stronger, at least at the present moment than U.S.-Palace relations in Kabul.

In some respects, there's more confidence there that the Indians can help construct the political

transition that we're talking about earlier. And the Pakistanis' fear of the Indian presence in Afghanistan are not completely unjustified. You know, just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean that India's not out to get you from a Pakistani perspective. (Laughter.)

But the assessment of the role of these consulates in funding Baloch national separatism and so forth is overdrawn. And there are problems of international support for anti-Pakistani groups, Baloch groups that operate sometimes in sanctuary elsewhere, including in Afghanistan, but they're simply not of the scale to justify the paranoia and the arguments Pakistanis bring to bear, I think.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: What about Iran? I mean one of the most heavily trafficked roads in Afghanistan today is the highway, the hardball highway built incidentally by the Indians through Balochi area that goes from Zaranj, on the Nimroz Iran border up to the Ring Road in Delaram. And yet the Indians see this, as do the Iranians, as a potential alternate route that connects the Arabian Sea to Central Asia. Yet our Washington's view on Iran is such that, you know, obviously dealing with them at much more even than an arm's length. Could they be brought in in a more constructive way to provide any sort of leverage, both with the Pakistanis or even in a more constructive way with regard to the Afghans in this process, do you think?

LTG BARNO: Well, I'll touch on and maybe ask Anne to talk on the diplomatic – I think a couple of aspects, one is the U.S. talked to the Afghan government about a long-term small U.S. troop footprint there. The U.S. needs to do that with a view towards the sensitivities Iran is going to have towards any Americans in Afghanistan at all, but certainly in the western part of Afghanistan. Iran has an immense economic impact all across western Afghanistan. If you go to Herat, the power that drives the electric lights in Herat comes from Iran. All of the trade that generates the economy and alike comes from Iran. They're closer, in many ways, to Iran than they are to Kabul. And that's not – similar throughout the whole western corner of Afghanistan. So I think U.S. has to be thoughtful of Iranian interests out there, especially as it thinks about troop presence.

Second final point would be that one of the things we recommend in our report is that the U.S. worked to open up trade and transit all across the region. The route you just describe is an example of a success story there that the United States is very ambivalent about right now because it involves Iran, who we have at best mixed relationships with.

So I think that arena is an area where, again, quietly we can do work to continue to open up those ties and maybe perhaps even use India's relation with Tehran to gain some advantage there as we try and sort out what an end state in Afghanistan is going to look like.

AMB. PATTERSON: I don't think Iran can play much of a role in Pakistan's consideration and I agree with everything Steve said about the relations – India's role in Afghanistan. India's role in

Balochistan isn't zero, but I think maybe we haven't talked enough about this. The way through this is ultimately a political settlement. And certainly everyone and through many administrations has been saying the only solution in Afghanistan is some kind of broad political settlement. And these (prior ?) Iran and India and others will have to be brought into that at some point. And Pakistan will have to be a broad settlement of some sort.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Take one last question from the room here. Right over here.

Q: Jeff Dressler from the Institute for the Study of War. With respect to Eastern Afghanistan and the militant groups that operate there and their relationship with al Qaeda and Lashkar-e-Taiba, how critical to the overall mission is it that the U.S. and the coalition get after these groups in the East, perhaps even a second front like we saw in the South, and if we don't, what are the consequences in terms of President Obama's objective stated specifically with respect to al Qaeda?

LTG BARNO: Go ahead, Bing, why don't you take a shot at that?

MR. WEST: Well, in terms of geography, there're just tall mountains. So if it's a mountain on the Pakistani side or a mountain on the Afghan side, it's just another mountain. And that's where these gangs are right now, and they're on both sides because we're no longer in Nuristan. So – (laughs) – we've already conceded that and I noticed on the General's charts that he had no intent of going back up into those areas. So to that extent, they're up 10,000 feet, 7,000, 8,000 feet, and that's where they are, buried in their caves.

I would just come back to one thing about it. We're fighting a war. We're fighting a big war and the question is how big we have to fight it, which has to do with how big is the guy you're fighting against, which has to do with materials, and the one thing that I see as being in terms of war fighting versus antiterrorist fighting is that I don't see the Taliban or any of the others receiving from anyone, Pakistan or anybody, the kinds of materials to make them, if you will, a material danger, so they can be pains in the neck in a lot of ways for – not sanctuary, they've won it up in the mountains – but getting that momentum to really move requires a lot of materials I don't see them getting. That's separate from them remaining as terrorists.

LTG BARNO: And I might just add to that I don't think the connection that you suggest between al Qaeda, Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba is a primary driver there. I think – particularly in Eastern Afghanistan. My take is that the Haqqani Network, which is probably the most dangerous insurgent group that U.S. forces are dealing with today, is going to require pressure from inside of Pakistan to neutralize its capabilities more so than fighting them directly in Eastern Afghanistan. There are some initial indications Pakistan might be moving in that direction. I'm moderately optimistic that in the next six months, we're going to see some action by the Pakistanis against the

Haqqani Network I think overtly and perhaps in some other arenas as well.

MR. CHANDRASEKARAN: Fantastic. I'd like to thank the panel for fascinating remarks here. General Barno, Ambassador Patterson, Steve Coll, and Bing West, thank you very much for joining us today. (Applause.)

Important housekeeping note – I'm told box lunches, which I hope will not be MREs, are served outside. Please be back here at 2:15. Thanks.

(END)